**ebooks@cambridge general meeting 16.4.2018**

**Notes from group discussions**

**Question 1: Question from Cambridge University Press**

**There is a widespread narrative in UK Higher Ed that undergraduate education is becoming more and more transactional.  Do you think that’s true at Cambridge, and if so, what are the implications for Cambridge libraries?’**

* Group 1 spent some time discussing what was meant by a transactional education system. We thought it might mean that students considered that they were buying a product, and the fact that they were paying customers entitled them to certain outcomes and services. We contrasted this idea of transactional learning with that of transformational learning (in short, no automatic right to qualifications or services, but emphasis on effort, self-motivation and bettering oneself).
* Group 1 thought that in some ways a Cambridge education/library service *might* be becoming more transactional:
  + Students are spending £9000 + per year, and expect a good degree at the end (the idea of purchased goods).
  + They also expect library resources to be available at all times, in the format that they want rather than a format that is chosen by/more cost-effective for the library. This might be print for some, e for others, or even print in some circumstances and e in others.
  + Students will compare what resources we have available to what is available at other universities.
* Group 4 agreed that there is a trend towards transactional education, but thought we are not yet experiencing pressure from students to view them as customers.
* Libraries are offering a wider range of services (wellbeing, skills training etc.) to meet student needs. However, some of these services – e.g. information literacy education – promote transformational learning, with an emphasis on equipping students to be self-sufficient, rather than spoon-feeding them.
* There might be some difference depending on subject area. For example, music students have to do a lot of work to gather resources (use a UL card catalogue to find scores that have not been catalogued online; listen to various recordings on equipment in the library; access book and journal articles that may or may not be available online). There is no backlash against this. Might this kind of research be valued (or at least accepted) by students as being part of the experience of being an Arts student? We thought that library services in STEM subjects *might* tend more towards the transactional.

Implications:

* Libraries need to be careful to manage student expectations, e.g. to be clear about library collection development policies.
* We need to direct students to other libraries which provide resources at other stages in a student’s course.

**Question 2: etextbooks**

**What do you think would be the benefits of e-textbooks, supplied on a one to one basis for each individual student to use as their own copy? Do you think there would be differences across subjects as to the take up of this kind of online resource? What issues are there against us dipping our toes into e-textbook provision in Cambridge?**

* “If a textbook is defined as a book written specifically for students on a particular course, then we don’t really have textbooks.”
* We have core reading, rather than textbooks. This may be quite a lot of titles, and we could never provide 1:1 access to all of them.
* Take-up and availability would depend on subject, e.g.:
  + STEM subjects heaviest users of textbooks
  + Language/linguistics more likely than literature (e.g. in modern languages).
* Our current print ratios for textbooks/core reading are not 1:1.
* Some textbooks enjoy cross-subject usage. Etextbooks could help with this (or the flip-side: how would FTE student numbers be determined for interdisciplinary courses?).
* The format of the etextbook would be important: e.g. reflowable text (lack of fixed page numbers) can cause problems for students when looking up references, citing etc.
* It is important to look at usage patterns of core texts and be careful how usage data is interpreted, e.g. students often want print access to books that are highly used (e.g. extensive reading, rather than just a chapter) rather than e.
* Judge Business School undertook a case study where they purchased an ebook for every student on a distance-learning course. The ebooks were not taken up by all students. Therefore, before investing large sums, there need to be proper trials and UX research to determine an appetite for the scheme.
* Problem of core textbooks frequently changing (e.g. new editions). Upgrades to new editions would need to be included in any package.
* Where is the money going to come from?
* What are the next steps? Who is responsible?

**Question 3: Drop-in sessions**

The ebooks@cambridge Advisory Group are aware that some librarians across Cambridge hold drop-in sessions to give their students the chance to find out more about e-resources, ebooks, managing references, research skills, etc. **Do you have experience of being involved in any drop-in sessions, and if so what do you think worked well or maybe didn’t work out as expected?** You could consider where the sessions were held, at what time, and what staff were available to answer student questions. Did you try and entice students to talk to you with promotional freebies? How many students turned up? **If you haven’t run a drop-in session in your library would you consider doing so? If not why not?**

**Positives of drop-ins:**

* They help students and library staff to get to know each other.
* They increase recognition of the library.
* They are can be highly rewarding for staff: when successful, they leave you with a real buzz.

**Negatives of drop-ins:**

* Attendance can be very low.
* How do you advertise them? All of the usual channels are being used, but awareness could still be increased.
* It takes a while to embed your sessions.
* Students often don’t know what to ask or what to get out of a session: how do you know what you don’t know?

**Ideas/suggestions:**

* An e-update at the beginning of the academic year would be useful.
* Collaboration across libraries.
* Travel around various sites: Downing Site, Sidgwick Site, South City Hub and West Cambridge.
* The Information Literacy project may be relevant here.
* Don’t forget accessibility issues when choosing locations.

**Question 4: Ebook platforms**

The ebooks service purchases content on a profuse number of ebooks supplier and publisher platforms. **Are you aware that the sheer number of platforms causes confusion and difficulties for students?** **Do you think many of your users recognise the differences between ebook platforms and do they ever express a preference for one or another?**

* Students seem to be more used to accessing and using different suppliers’ platforms than they once were.
* Their bottom line is that they want the information; the provider is not important.
* However, they are frustrated if a supplier’s platform doesn’t offer all of the facilities that they need, e.g. if they can’t easily find page numbers for referencing.
* Users like clarity on printing and downloading entitlements; for this reason they like Dawsonera and T&F Online [NB Ebook Central also displays this information clearly].

**Question 5: Open Access monographs**

**How aware are you about the various OA book platforms and collections that have been developed in the UK and Europe and more widely?** The ebook team activate some of these collections (i.e. DOAB, OAPEN, Project Gutenberg) in Primo Central Index (the knowledge base) so that catalogue records for OA books appear in iDiscover. **How aware are you of academics in your departments and faculties engaging with or publishing OA books? Do OA titles appear on reading lists?**

* Group members were aware of ResearchGate, a social networking site for scientists and researchers and that it can be seen as ‘a bad thing’ [we do not supply catalogue records for ResearchGate].
* Academics, librarians and students are confused about Open Access monographs.
* The view of the group were that they weren’t aware of OA titles on reading lists.

The Office of Scholarly Communications communicates regularly and prolifically about OA, but there was some uncertainty whether their efforts were making inroads and raising awareness at Cambridge.